

GSA's new strategy for livability

The General Services Administration, the primary building space provider for federal agencies, seeks to support smart growth.

HILLARY LEVITT ALTMAN

GSA's Center for Urban Development and Livability held its first national meeting in Washington, DC, in September. Together with a team of professional partners, including Congress for the New Urbanism members, GSA national and regional staff discussed how the administration and communities can work more closely together to support local revitalization efforts.

GSA is the primary space provider to federal agencies. Our customer agencies pay market-based rent for space that GSA buys, builds, renovates, or leases to meet their needs. With more than 300 million square feet of space in more than 1,600 cities, including 60 major cities, and an operating budget of \$5 billion, GSA is a significant investor in communities. We are committed to leveraging this investment in ways that support the efforts of local communities and other federal investments to promote community development.

CENTER ESTABLISHED

In support of this commitment, GSA recently established the Center for Urban Development and Livability. The Center helps GSA to leverage federal real estate actions in ways that bolster smart growth, economic vitality, and cultural vibrancy. Through partnerships with the CNU, Project for Public Spaces, the National Main Street Center, and other agencies and organizations, the Center provides technical assistance to GSA project teams and their partners nationwide. The Center's field staff support local partnerships and community involvement in GSA projects. Additionally, the Center provides policy guidance, training, and technical expertise to GSA staff, client agencies, and the communities where we work.

The Washington meeting was an important training and idea sharing session that begins the dialogue we need to change the way GSA does business. It was our first chance to work with CNU members Bill Morrish, Dena Belzer, Susan Barnes-Gelt, Rick Bernhardt, Charles Zucker, and Shelley Poticha, along with Fred Kent of the Project for Public Spaces. The three-day workshop covered how GSA real estate and location decisions reinforce or undermine community livability; how we can leverage our assets to foster livable communities; and how these assets can create and sustain value over time. Participants shared information on livability strategies, engaged in placemaking exercises, and discussed regional projects and the challenges and opportunities that GSA faces.

THIRTY PROJECTS UNDERWAY

One way that GSA is working more closely with communities is through a series of nearly 30 livability projects. These include plaza improvement projects, new courthouse design workshops, and the incorporation of indoor and outdoor retail in public areas of our buildings. Each project seeks to strengthen local partnerships, leverage federal investment in support of communities, provide high quality environments for our clients, and build GSA skills in synthesizing these areas. By finding new ways to reach out to local and regional partners and building stronger community relationships, GSA will be able to meet its customer needs in ways that support more livable communities, and will become a key partner in community revitalization.

The Center looks forward to working with the CNU in building healthier, stronger communities across the nation, and hopes CNU members will serve as technical advisors to communities. ♦

Hillary Levitt Altman is director of the Center for Urban Development and Livability at the US General Services Administration.

Organization News

■ CNU's long-awaited book, *Charter of the New Urbanism*, will be available in time for Christmas. This book is a collection of essays and commentary by 35 leading new urbanist thinkers. Each writer starts with a sentence from CNU's 1994 Charter and expands upon it, developing a stirring essay. Topics range from the practice of writing regional plans to the theory of New Urban aesthetics. The illustrated 200-page volume is available in bookstores or from CNU for \$49.95.

■ The Surdna Foundation is renewing its funding to continue CNU's efforts to reform development finance practices and to team up with like-minded regional activist groups. The local groups will provide grassroots networks while CNU will provide expertise, strategic planning, and communications.

■ There are new faces in the CNU office. Sarah Pulleyblank oversees task forces and is organizing the 2000 Congress. Steven Bodzin handles membership issues and media contacts. Thanks and best of luck to Jennifer Hock and Josh Switzky.

■ "Urbanisms: New and Other" is the title of the third New Urbanism academic conference, to be held February 25 to 27, 2000, at the University of California at Berkeley College of Environmental Design. For more information on this all-star event, call the dean's office at Berkeley: (510) 642-0831.

■ CNU and the Urban Land Institute will be cohosting a training conference, "Developing New Urban Communities," for developers, public officials, and planners, April 10-12, 2000, in Orlando, Florida. Contact ULI at (202) 624-7000; www.uli.org. ♦

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